

# Maurice Hinchey NEWS

## 22nd CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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### **HINCHEY: FCC SPAWNS "NEW CENSORSHIP"**

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-22) condemned today's decision by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to weaken the rules governing ownership of media outlets. Hinchey has been outspoken in his opposition to the move because of the loss of media independence and diversity that will result.

"On a party-line vote today, the FCC has instituted a new censorship in America," said Hinchey. "If this decisions holds, then a select few will determine what information and entertainment the public will have access to. This decision flies in the face of democracy and is clearly not in the best interest of the American people."

In today's decision, the FCC increased the number of TV stations one company can own as well as the percentage of U.S. households a company can reach. It also weakened the rules that prevent companies from controlling different forms of media in the same market. Under the new rules, a national television network may now acquire dozens of local broadcaster stations and control up to 90 percent of the national television market. A single corporation may now acquire in one city up to three television stations, eight radio stations, the cable television system, numerous cable television stations and the only daily newspaper.

FCC Chairman Michael Powell and the two other Republican-appointed commissioners voted for the rule change, while the two Democratic appointees voted against it. Numerous organizations, including the National Rifle Association, Consumers' Union, the Consumer Federation of America, the National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters, the National Organization of Women, the Communications Workers of America, the Newspaper Guild, the Media Access Project, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Parents Television Council, and the Conference of Catholic Bishops, have expressed strong opposition to the weakening of the rules. Columnists as diverse as Paul Krugman and William Safire have decried the change. Of the more than 500,000 public comments received by the FCC prior to the decision, 99.9 percent were in opposition.

"It's worth noting that this was a partisan vote by the commission despite the bipartisan opposition from across the country," Hinchey added. "Republican ideologues in Washington have increasingly diminished the independence and diversity of media outlets since the 1980s. Democrats are now waking up to this disturbing trend."

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In 1987 President Reagan's FCC eliminated the Fairness Doctrine, which required that a broadcaster give equal time to opposing points of view. In the 1996 Telecommunications Act, Congress eliminated the national radio ownership caps and increased the national TV ownership limit. It also instituted the current process by which the FCC must justify the necessity of its media ownership rules every two years. Hinchey was one of only 16 members of the House to vote against the 1996 Act.

Since 1975, two-thirds of America's independent newspapers have disappeared, and nearly three-quarters of the country's media markets have only one local daily newspaper. One-third of the nation's independent TV stations have vanished in the last 27 years. Eighty percent of the radio audience is now tuned to broadcasts controlled by just three corporations. Commensurate with this consolidation of ownership has been a decline in coverage of local news and events, particularly in rural communities, and a decline in the presentation of divergent viewpoints.

Hinchey has actively opposed any further erosion of media ownership rules. On February 3 he sent a letter to Powell, expressing serious concerns about the commission's planned rule changes. The letter was signed by 30 members of Congress. Hinchey subsequently introduced House Resolution 218, which urged the FCC not to revise its media ownership rules without extensive review and public scrutiny. The resolution had 135 cosponsors before today's decision.

"Now it's time for Congress to step in and put a stop to this fiasco," Hinchey said. "The public is being deprived of control of its own airwaves. I'm going to do everything I can to see that this injustice is corrected."